

Effect of World Whaling on the Population
of Large Whales

1. The major whaling areas of the world are the northern Pacific and the Antarctic. Only Japan, the USSR and Norway still operate whaling fleets in these waters. Although the world whale catch has been regulated to some extent by international agreements since 1932, modern methods of catching and processing whales have led to their severe decimation.

2. The largest whales, the blue, sperm, humpback, fin and sei whales, have nearly disappeared from the north Pacific and are being rapidly depleted in the Antarctic. In particular, the humpback and blue whales are approaching extinction.

3. The International Whaling Commission* (IWC) has been charged since 1946 with regulating the whale catch in order to protect and ensure the growth of stocks. The Commission has not been successful in maintaining an overall catch limit in the Antarctic. The overall catch has been declining in recent years not so much because of regulation as because of a reduction in stocks. In the 1961/62 whaling season, the overall world catch of large whales listed above amounted to 60,090 according to official data of the whaling nations (see Table 1). By the 1966/67 season the catch had fallen to 51,593 whales. In this time span the catch of blue whales declined from 1,255 to 70 and the catch of humpbacked whales declined from 2,436 to 4. The distribution of the catch by country of blue and humpbacked whales since 1961 is reflected in the following tabulation:

	1961/62 Season		1961-1967 Total	
	Blue	Humpback	Blue	Humpback
USSR	402	270	692	533
Japan	489	2	1254	9
Norway	132	12	136	12

* Composed of Argentina, Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, South Africa, USSR, UK, and US.

4. Of the total catch of 51,593 large whales reported for the Antarctic in the 1966/67 season, Japan caught 44 percent, the USSR 39 percent and Norway 17 percent. The overall catch limit and each country's share of it is set by the IWC. Moreover, an independent committee of scientists under IWC sponsorship has established maximum catches that will not endanger the whale population for each species; i.e., the maximum sustainable yields for each type of whale in the Antarctic. These limits require drastic reductions in quotas which the whaling countries are unwilling to accept.

5. The depletion of the humpbacked and blue whales was not solely the fault of the Soviets, although they must share in the blame with the Japanese for continued killing of these species after they became scarce. The drastic reduction of the blue whale has been accomplished since the end of WW II by modern whaling fleet operations because this is the largest and most valuable meat producing whale. The humpbacked whale, also decimated since the end of WW II was largely slaughtered by whalers operating from shore stations in New Zealand and Australia. It was the misfortune of the humpback to have established migratory habits that took it close to the coasts of these countries. This industry, of course, became uneconomic with the thinning out of the species.

6. If the killing of the blue and humpbacked whales is entirely stopped, they may have a chance for survival. The blue apparently has the poorest chance because it has no known migratory pattern. It feeds from the equator to the Antarctic and Arctic and mates in the open ocean. So few remain that the probability of encounters for mating purposes is not very good. Scientists believe, however, that there may be some hope for the blue and humpbacked whales and cite the case of the "right" whale, a species supposedly extinct at the end of the 1800's has been found in recent years to still exist and to be increasing somewhat.

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Table 1

World-wide Number of Whales Caught in Selected Seasons

	<u>1961/62</u>	<u>1966/67</u>
Total	66,090	51,593
of which:		
Blue	1,255	70
Fin	30,178	6,342
Humpback	2,436	4
Sei	8,804	18,990
Sperm	23,316	25,921
Unspecified	101	266

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REMARKS:		
<p>Sources of information are the Bureau of Fisheries in the Department of Interior and a specialist at the Smithsonian Institute (a [REDACTED] (sp. ?). [REDACTED] provided the information on the New Zealand culpability.</p> <p><i>[Handwritten signature/initials over remarks]</i></p>		
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